

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5488
DAVID LENT/ROME

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ITALIAN POLITICAL SAGA

ANNCR:

THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT CRISIS -- NOW IN ITS THIRD WEEK -- HAS CREATED A DILEMMA FOR THE RULING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. FROM ROME, VOA'S DAVID LENT SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE, GIULIO ANDREOTTI, HAS GIVEN UP HIS EFFORTS TO FIND SUPPORT FOR ANOTHER MINORITY GOVERNMENT BY NEGOTIATING ON THE PROPOSED GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM ALONE. THIS IS ALL HIS PARTY HAD AUTHORIZED HIM TO DO.

HIS ROUND OF TALKS LAST WEEK -- AND A DISCUSSION SEVERAL DAYS AGO WITH THE LEADER OF THE SMALL REPUBLICAN PARTY -- UGO LA MALFA -- HAVE CONVINCED HIM THAT TO PURSUE SUCH LIMITED TALKS WOULD BE FRUITLESS.

NOW HE HAS TURNED BACK TO HIS PARTY TO SEEK A BROADER MANDATE. HE WANTS AUTHORITY TO NEGOTIATE FORMATION OF A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY -- INCLUDING THE COMMUNISTS -- WHICH WOULD SUPPORT A NEW MINORITY GOVERNMENT.

ALTHOUGH THE COMMUNISTS ARE FORMALLY STILL DEMANDING CABINET SEATS IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS HAVE MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT THEY WILL NOT ACCEPT COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION -- AND THAT THEY WOULD PREFER EARLY ELECTIONS INSTEAD.

THE CRISIS HAS PROVOKED THE FIRST SERIOUS CHALLENGE IN THIRTY-FIVE YEARS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE COTERIE OF SENIOR CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICIANS WHO HAVE FILLED CABINET POSTS ON A REVOLVING BASIS IN THE THIRTY-NINE ITALIAN GOVERNMENTS SINCE THE FALL OF FASCISM IS NO LONGER SURE IT CAN COUNT ON ITS OWN RANK-AND-FILE PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTIES.

A GROUP OF MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED YOUNG CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC DEPUTIES IS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO BRINGING THE COMMUNIST PARTY CLOSER TO THE EXERCISE OF REAL POWER. AND THIS GROUP IS KNOWN TO FEEL THAT MAKING THE COMMUNISTS PART OF A FORMAL PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY UPON WHICH THE NEXT GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO DEPEND WILL MEAN AUTOMATIC COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN AN ITALIAN CABINET AT A LATER DATE.

THIS GROUP IS ARGUING THAT ITALY'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC DEPUTIES WERE ELECTED TWO YEARS AGO ON A PLATFORM OF OPPOSING COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT -- AND THAT THEY HAVE NO RIGHT NOW TO GO BACK ON THIS PLEDGE.

SO MISTER ANDREOTTI'S APPEAL FOR A BROADER MANDATE WILL BE TAKEN TO THE PARTY'S NATIONAL DIRECTORATE ON FRIDAY. BUT A DECISION IN THIS BODY, WHICH IS MADE UP LARGELY OF PARTY VETERANS -- FORMER GOVERNMENT MINISTERS -- IS CONSIDERED UNLIKELY. INSTEAD, IT IS BEING PREDICTED THAT THE DIRECTORATE WILL SUMMON AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL COUNCIL, WHICH REPRESENTS A BROADER SPECTRUM OF THE PARTY MEMBERSHIP.

AND IT IS IN THIS FORUM -- MOST PROBABLY -- THAT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO TRY FURTHER COMPROMISE WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

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WJL/RTD